

NSW TISSUE BANK NEWSLETTER

February 2026

WELCOME FROM VANESSA



Over the past year, the NSW Tissue Bank has remained focused on what matters most: supporting life changing outcomes for tissue recipients through safe, ethical and compassionate donation.

Every cornea we distribute, every conversation with a donor family reflects the ongoing commitment of our teams across coordination, retrieval, manufacturing, quality and research.

Welcome to the February edition of the NSW Tissue Bank Newsletter and the start of another busy year. As we head into 2026, we're ready for another year of doing what we do best: supporting our community. The new year also gives us a chance to refocus and move forward with clear priorities.

Over the past year, we achieved several key milestones, such as contributing nationally to the Human Tissue Laws review and advancing the planning for our future Tissue Bank facility. It was also a year defined by the dedication and flexibility of our people, who continue to deliver high standards of care and professionalism in an ever-changing and challenging environment.

Looking ahead, we're excited to strengthen partnerships, further develop our facilities and capabilities, and continue to honour the generosity of donors and their families.

We will also host the 3rd National Eye and Tissue Banking Conference in March, a two-day program of international speakers and educational presentations.

Thank you all for your dedication, commitment, and hard work over the past year. Your ongoing efforts, resilience, and collaboration have made a meaningful difference, and we truly appreciate everything you do. We are looking forward to building on this momentum in the year ahead and continuing our work together to achieve even greater outcomes.

We at the NSW Tissue Bank would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the traditional owners of the land on which we base our work, and acknowledge Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

TISSUE DONOR STORY

ELLA'S FINAL GIFT: HOW A 19-YEAR- OLD CHANGED THE EYESIGHT OF 10 PEOPLE

Ella Wilson-Lucey was just 19 years old when her life was tragically cut short, but in her passing, she gave an extraordinary gift — one that changed many lives forever.



A proud Wiradjuri woman, Ella was known for her wicked sense of humour, compassion, kindness, quick wit, and artistic talent. Initially accepted into the University of Sydney to study psychology, her passion for creativity led her down a different path — tattoo artistry. At the time of her passing, she was working as a tattoo apprentice, learning how to bring her artistic visions to life on skin.

Her mother, Nicola, was confronted not only with the loss of her daughter but also with a question she never expected — tissue donation.

'I never thought I would receive a call asking if Ella could donate her tissue. I didn't even think it was possible. I thought if she wasn't on life support, she couldn't donate,' Nicola recalls.

Many people are unaware that tissue donation does not require a donor to die within a hospital, unlike organ donation. Tissues such as eyes, tendons, and bones can be donated up to 24 hours after death.

Before her death, Ella and the family had talked about donation and Ella believed in giving others a second chance — Nicola and Ella's dad, Terry, knew that honouring Ella's wishes was the right decision.

'It was natural for me to say yes. But I had one request. I remember saying, 'You can retrieve from her arms, but you cannot cut into her art,' Nicola shares.

Ella, a passionate tattoo artist, had a beautiful sleeve of tattoos that reflected her identity and creativity. When Nicola was assured that her daughter's

artwork would remain untouched, she consented without hesitation.

Through her donation, Ella gave the gift of sight by donating both of her corneas, allowing two people to see the world anew, and helped an additional eight people through her sclera donation. Her tendons and bones were also retrieved, helping many others regain mobility and improve their quality of life.

For Nicola, knowing that others now see through Ella's corneas brings comfort.

'I hope they see the world through her eyes because she was so kind and accepting of everyone,' she says. *'More Ellas in the world would be a good thing.'*

Nicola now encourages other families to have conversations about organ and tissue donation.

'In that terrible time of tragedy and shock, I knew Ella would want to do the right thing and donate. There's no point in taking your organs and tissue with you — it's a gift that could save someone's life.'

Loved deeply by her friends and family, Ella's kindness and generosity shine even in her absence. Through her tissue donation, she gave peace of mind to her loved ones, knowing her selflessness helped others in need. Her legacy lives on in the people she helped, in the art she created, and in the memories of those who loved her.

To register or check your Australian Organ Donation Registry head to:

[How to register as an Australian organ donor — Australian Organ Donor Register — Services Australia](#)



LEADERSHIP NEWS

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Since 1997, the Lions NSW Eye Bank has proudly called The Sydney and Sydney Eye Hospital home — Australia's oldest and arguably most beautiful medical institution.

The Hospital's specialist focus made it the ideal setting for tissue banking in NSW. Over time, it welcomed the consolidation of services, bringing together the NSW Bone Bank, Lions NSW Eye Bank and the Australian Ocular Biobank, which united in 2011 as the NSW Tissue Bank under the newly formed NSW Organ & Tissue Donation Service (NSW OTDS).

Five years later, we extended again into the former basement mortuary to accommodate two additional tissue programs, a development made possible through the continued support of South Eastern Sydney LHD (SESLHD).

By 2021, emerging requirements under Good Manufacturing Practice demanded a rethink of our infrastructure and manufacturing design. The view emerged that it was time to move out and so began a four-year search for alternative accommodations with not a match in sight.

By 2025, the need for certainty had become critical. With strong leadership from NSW OTDS and SESLHD and a renewed commitment to thoughtful long term planning, a clear path forward emerged.

And the best part, our future remains at The Sydney and Sydney Eye Hospital. Rather than relocating, we will refit and refurbish our existing space, creating enhanced manufacturing facilities that support the next chapter of our work.

Staying rooted in the place that has shaped so much of our identity ensures the journey ahead is both achievable and energising.



HIGHLIGHTS

2025: A Year of Impact and Collaboration

HIGHLIGHT

STEPPING UP FOR QUEENSLAND

A major highlight came in March when a fire disrupted operations at the Queensland Tissue Bank. NSW quickly provided support to help maintain their service continuity, demonstrating the importance of strong interstate collaboration.

Staff contributed to research, took part in **EBAANZ** and **BAA** activities, and continued to raise awareness of eye and tissue donation. These efforts strengthened NSW's role in advancing best practice across Australia.

The team also worked with the Ministry of Health on policy and legal reforms, while continuing to improve governance, quality and safety across the Tissue Bank.

Finally, the Tissue Bank team remained committed to raising awareness about the importance of eye and tissue donation.

These community-focused efforts help build understanding, encourage conversations, and ultimately increase the number of people whose lives can be transformed through donation.

HIGHLIGHT

2025 TISSUE DONOR TREE OF REMEMBRANCE

The 2025 NSW Tissue Bank Donor Tree of Remembrance is now complete.

This simple yet powerful tribute honours tissue donors, with each leaf bearing the name of a donor whose generous gift has helped transform the lives of others.

Each year, the NSW Tissue Bank works closely with donor families to seek consent for inclusion on the tree. Together, the leaves form a visual representation of the year's donation activity and the profound impact of donation across the community.



"You the Family and the Donor will not be forgotten."

A grateful recipient

STAFF SPOTLIGHT:

MONIRA HOQUE: RESEARCHER

When Monira Hoque joined the NSW Tissue Bank in July 2018, she remembers two things clearly: 'a lot of protocols to read' and spending the whole day in an uncomfortable pink blazer. Seven years later, she's now a core part of the research team.

Supporting Research Partners

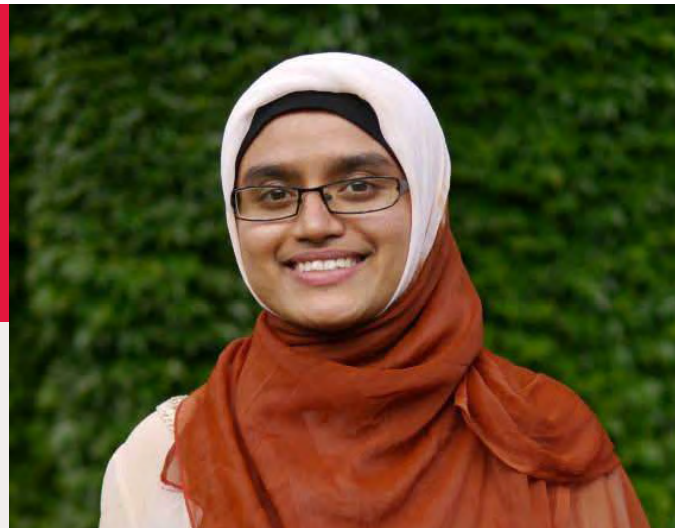
As a researcher working across several areas, Monira is part of a team that allows equitable distribution of donated research tissue on behalf of external research partners. Some of these partners are leading experts in tissue engineering and novel treatments of various eye disorders. Her team also supports and guides decisions relating to tissue collection, storage and review.

"We need to be able to explain why we do things. Everything must minimise risk for the patient, that's at the heart of our work," she says.

Advancing Community Awareness

Alongside lab responsibilities, Monira volunteers for research projects dedicated to raising awareness about organ donation registration and the generational impact it has. It's work that keeps her inspired.

"What keeps me here is the chance to keep learning, not just new things, but the same things from different perspectives," she says.



Life Outside the Lab

Outside of work, Monira is a busy mum to two kids. They spend lots of time at parks and on bushwalks, looking for the next victim to join their backyard bug hotel. She loves baking, crafting and thrifts like it's a religion.

Coming from a Bengali and Islamic background, Monira says her decision to work in tissue donation aligns deeply with her values.

'For me, it's about giving someone more time! If I can help save someone's life, that is the best thing you can do, give them more time to experience all the wonderful things this world has to offer, and hopefully do some good with it too!'

As a practising Muslim, she notes that organ and tissue donation is something that needs more attention, but for her, the broader purpose is clear.

'It's simple: it's the highest act of generosity at the end of your life - to save another person's life.'

Watch Monira's story [here](#)



STAFF RECOGNITION

PHIL BOWER: DIAMOND HONOUR AWARD

Former Laboratory Manager Raj Devasahayam was awarded a 'Phil Bower Diamond Honour Award' in appreciation of his years of service to the Lions NSW Eye Bank. The award was extended at the final Lions Foundation Board Meeting of 2025 and was presented by Lions NSW-ACT Sight & Health Foundation Ltd. Honorary Secretary; Rosemary Sheather and Chairman Bob Gnezdiloff.

NATIONAL HARMONISATION OF HUMAN TISSUE LAWS

In 2025, the Australian Government commissioned the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) to conduct a comprehensive national review of state and territory human tissue laws.

Prompted by the need to reflect contemporary and emerging clinical and research practices, this is the first major review of these laws in almost 50 years.

The ALRC has now released a discussion paper outlining a broad reform agenda, including 49 proposals and 47 questions focused on modernising consent, donation and governance frameworks across Australia. The paper is deliberately practical in scope, aiming to reduce legal fragmentation and administrative burden through reforms that could be implemented nationally.

Consultation has been central to the review from its outset. Most recently, members of the NSW Tissue Bank, alongside representatives from the Eye Bank Association of Australia and New Zealand (EBAANZ) and the Biotherapeutics Association of Australasia (BAA), met with the review team to provide feedback on the discussion paper.

The team spoke highly of the review team's depth of understanding and their openness to the operational realities of the tissue donation sector, leaving us optimistic that lived experience and evidence will inform the final recommendations.

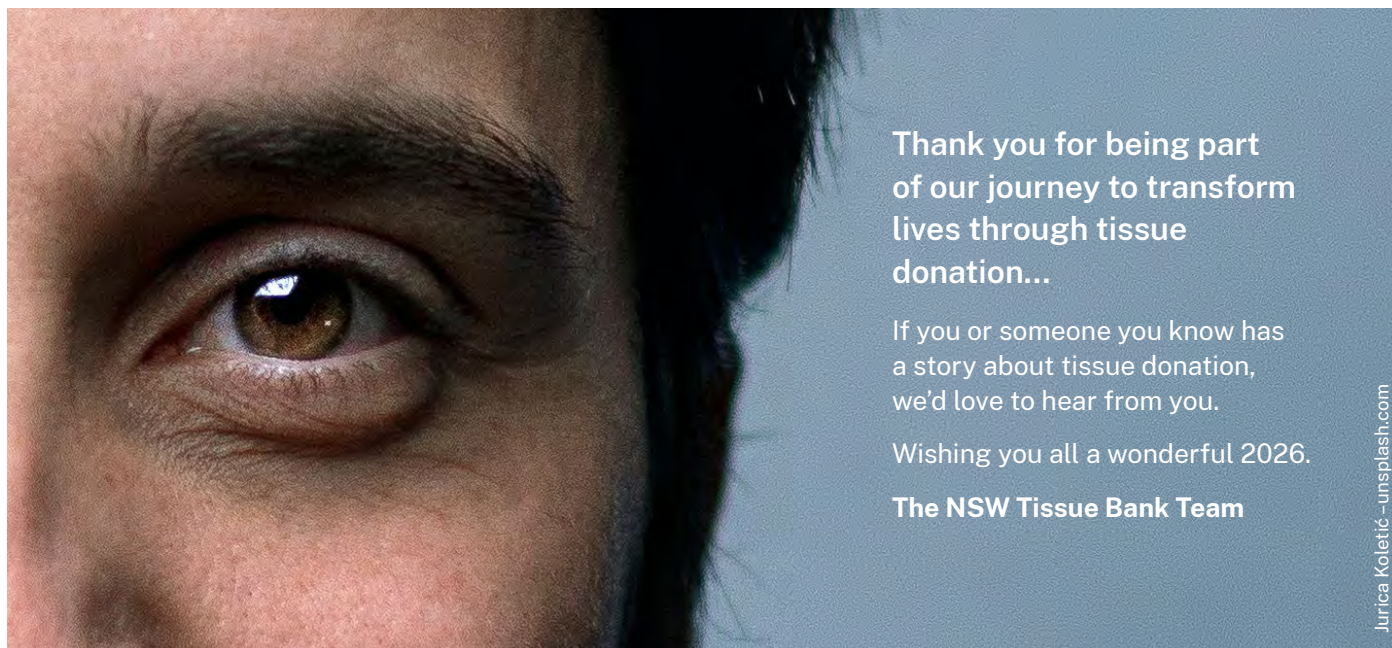
To learn more about the ALRC's review and consultation process, watch [here](#).

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



3-4 March 2026 3rd National Eye & Tissue Banking Conference (EBAANZ & BAA), Art Gallery of NSW, [book here](#)

See more details here: [Events](#) | [DonateLife](#)



Thank you for being part of our journey to transform lives through tissue donation...

If you or someone you know has a story about tissue donation, we'd love to hear from you.

Wishing you all a wonderful 2026.

The NSW Tissue Bank Team

Jurica Koletic - unsplash.com



Health
NSW Organ & Tissue
Donation Service

Incorporating:
NSW Bone Bank
Lions NSW Eye Bank
Australian Ocular Biobank



Design: joyuendesign.com.au

Ph: 9382 7855